

# Yalobusha Review

---

Volume 19

Article 1

---

January 2021

## Full Issue

Journal Editors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Editors, Journal (2021) "Full Issue," *Yalobusha Review*: Vol. 19 , Article 1.  
Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr/vol19/iss1/1>

This Introduction is brought to you for free and open access by eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Yalobusha Review by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).



# YR: 19



# YR:19

---

Fiction

PAUL LUIKART

The End of Fun

JERRY RENEK

Lala is Not Real

NORMAN LOCK

Four Impossible Objects

NORMAN WAKSLER

Autumn Morning, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

KEVIN WEIDNER

Bang, Bang, Blood and Suffocation

Poetry

CATHERINE WAGNER

Four Poems

DANIELLE PAFUNDA

Four Poems



ROBERT BRUNO

My Man Is Fresh Tho

C. VIOLET EATON

Four Poems

CATHERINE THEIS

A Work Of Art

SUZI F. GARCIA

Three Poems

EMILY WILSON

Three Poems

DANNIEL SCHOONEBEEK

Interns

# THE END OF FUN

Paul Luikart

Andy kicked the wide, glass front doors of Phoenix First National Bank out of his way and stuffed the .38 into the back of his jeans. He leaped down the marble steps, skidding in his cowboy boots, all the while trailed by rogue bills—hundreds and fifties contorting little escapes from his pockets and the bulging pillowcase in his left hand. He hollered, “Yeehaw!” and fumbled with some keys, hollered, “Fuck you!” over his shoulder, yanked open the driver’s door of the rusty blue Camry, jumped in, and was gone. A pale cloud of toasted rubber, asphalt, and a few lazy bills spun in the desert breeze.

He didn’t stop till Wickenburg, almost into Yavapai County. The Camry was about out of gas anyway, so he filled it up, stole some Red Bull, and then pulled into the McDonald’s parking lot. Robbing banks will leave a body famished. Just a completely hollow gut. Andy felt it bad, a bulb of an ache right below his stick-out ribs. He sat in the car for a few minutes, patted his skinny belly, then smoked a cigarillo down to the plastic tip. Checking over his shoulder too. There was nobody. He got out.

“Couple of Quarter Pounders, give me two fries too, big sized, and the biggest Coke you got.”

“Will that be all?”

“Throw a couple of pies in there too. Make ‘em apple.”

The kid pushed a few buttons, red ones and blue ones, and then the total popped up. He handed the kid some money.

“Oh,” the kid said.

“You ever seen one of them before? Probably not.”

“I can’t give you change, not from this drawer. I’ll check with my manager.”

Andy’s hand shot out and grabbed the kid’s scrawny wrist. “Don’t check with your manger. I don’t need no change. Hell, keep it yourself. I’m starving, so hurry on up.”

The kid’s eyes bulged. Big brown circles in big white ones. He looked like he was about to say something, but then he straightened and worked his arm loose of Andy’s grip.

“Keep it?”

“Keep all it.”

The kid put the bill in the drawer, under the till.

Andy was the only customer in the place. He chomped and slurped and stared out at the desert. It went on forever. There were cacti and low, jagged mountains off in the distance, all of it baked by the sun, baked by it for, what, thousands of years, millions maybe. Baked down to little nubs of plants and rocks, with little stunted animals creeping and darting here and there. Everything cooked off but the main guts of some ancient, spooky geology. Water sometimes choked out of the hard sand here and there, enough to make dark brown circles that took about five minutes to evaporate completely. That's what they call springs. Nothing but a tease. Andy pulled out his cell phone, touched some buttons, put it to his ear. The call went right to voicemail.

"Mama," he said, cupping the phone to his mouth, "It's Andy. I been thinking about home. Sis told me you buried Tommy in April. Can't say I'll miss the sumnabitch. I know you're gonna. For some damn reason. You got your reasons, Mama, I know you got 'em."

Andy's eyes swooped around the McDonald's.

"I just love my mama. I just love her. Andy loves his mama." He flipped the phone shut and wiped his eyes with the tough skin on the back of his hand, then stuck the phone back in his pocket. He stuffed the Quarter Pounder wrappers into the fry boxes, drank off his Coke, and picked up the pies. He went back to the register. In two seconds, the barrel of the .38 was between the kid's eyes.

"Changed my mind. Let me get that bill back, plus whatever else's in there."

The kid was frozen.

"Did I just make you piss yourself?"

"No."

"I'm nice enough. Don't I look nice? Look at my face. It's a nice face, ain't it?"

"I guess so?"

"You guess so? Let me ask you something, and be honest. You like your job?"

"What?"

"I like my job. I like my job real well."

"Hey." The manager who this probably was, a bald middle aged man with a clean white shirt and a black bow tie with teensy Golden Arches all over it.

"Hi there. I'm sticking up your employee here."

"Don't hurt anybody." The manager held his hands up, palms out.

"Hurry up, son," Andy said, eyes on the manager.

"Give it to him, James," the manager said.

"James. Why don't you shove it in that bag there?"

James stuffed the drawer's green contents into a to-go bag.

"You want the change too?" James said.

"Look at this customer service," Andy said, "No I don't, thank you for asking."

Give James here a raise, would you?"

The manger nodded, but didn't make eye contact with either of them.

"Hey, do me one favor before I go, James."

The kid's face was blank.

"Why don't you get a cheeseburg. Go on. Then bring it out here."

When the kid got back with the small loafy thing wrapped in yellow, Andy said, "Now, heave it up into the air. Wait. Ain't enough room in here. Come on, we're going outside. You too, let's go. Get all your people from the back. Get 'em. Make it quick."

Andy directed the manager around the restaurant with the gun barrel. The manager spoke in a strained voice, panic leaking into his words. He was whispering mainly, but it was like his brain wanted to scream. Everybody filed outside into the parking lot, a platoon of maroon-shirted, black-hatted kids, then the manager in white, then Andy.

"You got that cheeseburg, James? Watch this. Heave it up as high as you can."

The kid looked at Andy with pinched-together eyebrows.

"Well, come on."

The kid reared back and threw the cheeseburger so high and hard he left his feet. Andy aimed and fired, a miss. The crack echoed off the McDonald's windows and rolled away out into the desert. The cheeseburger plopped down on the pavement. Nobody said a word. Andy stepped to the burger and fired a shot into it, meat and pickles and shredded bun flying all over his boots.

"That got it." He looked up. "See you all."

Fifteen minutes out into the desert, there appeared suddenly a band of mustangs along an old barbed wire-topped fence that vanished with the I-10 over the horizon. Andy whooped and stomped on the breaks, the little Camry fishtailing to a halt on the shoulder. He leaped out, slammed the door, and scrambled up the berm to the fence, little cascades of brittle granite sliding away under his boots. He watched the horses run. He howled, his voice ragged and sputtering on the lingering dust cloud. Several hundred yards away, the horses wheeled, scrabbling over each other, and romped back. Andy's breath caught in his throat. He got as close to the fence as he could, close enough almost to get his chin hung up on the barbed wire.

The animals were magnificent. The thunder of their hooves rattled his teeth. Out shot their forelegs and back under their massive bodies they curled over and over, huge, angular chunks of the hard pack sand flying up against the sky. Most all had white blazes from blonde forelocks on down to their pink and gray speckled noses, the nostrils flared and pulsing with each voracious intake of breath. Their



manes and tails flamed out behind them. And the sweat darkened their massive flanks, patches of wet down their bare hides, giving shape and definition to the rolling muscle. When they were past, a spray of wind and stink and grit slapped Andy on the back and he stared after them with his mouth hanging open.

The horses wheeled again. They charged back along the fence, unaware of anything else, it seemed, except each other and the ability to run. They nicked, bit, whinnied, shoved. Once again they were almost upon him, only a few feet on the other side of the fence. Andy smiled, closed his eyes and threw his head back, drinking the same heated air into his lungs the horses were drinking into theirs. He laughed, a long, rolling laugh that poured out of him like a monsoon waterfall blasting between rocks.

Then a snap, then a scream. The horses suddenly cleared off, each running in its direction, except one. A stallion, screaming so hard its tongue shot straight from its mouth, a pink slab wedged between yellow-white teeth, gray lips curled back. White flecks of froth in the corners of the horse's mouth. With each scream, its entire body shook. It reared on its hind legs over and over, bucking and snorting, and its eyes were on fire. Andy, ducking the barbed wire, pressed into the fence.

The animal's right front leg had snapped at the fetlock, its hoof now swinging freely. It moved like a sock with a bar of soap in the toe. The animal's rear legs gave out and it stumbled and fell, its entire weight crashing down on the wounded leg and the horse screamed louder, bitter screams that ripped the air. But the animal clamored up, tossing its head and leaping, raising a thin brown cloud in the air around itself. The fall had compounded the fracture, and Andy could see the stark white of pointed bone sticking through the skin, the chestnut of the coat around the fetlock reddening.

"Ohnohshit," Andy whispered.

The horse danced in a circle, almost breaking its neck, its broad back rolling and snapping as if it was trying to throw an invisible rider. Just for a second, Andy's eyes came square with one of the horse's, a glazed-over orb. The thing was trying to say something. The head bobbed again, the eyes now heavenward and it would not stop screaming.

Andy scrambled back to the Camry, slipping on the loose gravel. He ripped into the car by the passenger door, grabbed the .38 from the seat, cussed again, and fairly flew back up to the fence. The wounded horse had bounded away, about fifty yards off.

"Horse, I can't shoot that far," Andy yelled.

"Horse!"

The horse was in the gun's sights now, the gun quivering in Andy's hands. He tried to hold the weapon the way he'd seen police do it. It was hard to aim at the



bouncing thing. "Horse," he called again. Then he fired.

The stallion leaped sideways. Squinting, Andy could see a little button of red on the horse's flank and the animal stumbled. It flipped its head like it was trying to look behind itself. He fired again and the horse fell over, but its legs beat the air, the injured one below the broken fetlock spinning like a pinwheel at the top of the leg.

Andy slithered under the fence tearing a sleeve on a hidden nail in the fence post. He bolted to the horse and found it sputtering blood, crimson running in little washes down the chestnut hide. When it saw him, it made a lame attempt to get its legs under itself, but could not and tipped back onto the ground. Long, drooping lines of blood like cables from the corners of its mouth tethered the beast to the sand.

Andy caught himself staring. Who knows how long. Before him, the horse rolled, cried, flipped its massive body around in the sand, but every time it made a move, the next one would be less, and the one after that less. Andy rubbed his eyes. Two more steps and the horse's head was square at his feet, still now except for a tremor every few seconds. He held the gun at the angle of the eye and the ear. The horse looked at him and he fired. The head bounced against the sand, the tongue, slimed with black blood, lolled from the mouth and pretty soon a wash of deep red blood flowed out, collecting dust and tiny pebbles and dried petals of yellow and light from the desert floor and pushing on, outward like an expanding halo.

Andy sat down. Little breaths pattered between his lips and the sweat dripped down his forehead, stinging his eyes, speckling his jeans as it dripped from his nose, cheeks, and chin. He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, the hand still clutching the black rubber grip of the .38. The gun was heavy. He set it down at his feet. He sat by the horse a long time, thinking about vultures and when they'd show and would they think him a dead thing also, would they pick and peck at his skin, would they strip his bones.

When he stood, the sky was changing. The sun had sunk below the western rim of the world, leaving a glowing orange crust, a line of smoldering embers sprinkled across the tops of the scraggy mountains far away. A blanket of black was falling on the horizon from the east with snags of starlight and two or three burning ribs of meteors. He stooped and picked up the gun. There was one shell left. Two at the burger, three in the horse, so one left in the cylinder. He stuffed it in his belt at the back of his jeans and ambled heavy-footed back to the fence. He turned. There was the carcass. The dark mound looked like a rock outcropping. A piece of the desert. An old piece of the desert changed into a new piece anyway. He sunk

down, slid under the fence and walked-slid across the berm to the car. It took a couple of tries, but the engine crashed to life, the headlights came on, and Andy drove off down the I-10 into the night.

At the diner, Neon Slim's, somebody recognized him. A barrel chested rancher-type with a dyed black mustache and rusty boot spurs. He stepped over to Andy's booth in the corner and stood beside it. Andy looked up.

"So," the rancher-type said, "You hear the one about the horse and the bar? This horse walks into a bar and the bartender says, 'Why the long face?'"

"That was funny when I first heard it about a hundred years ago." Andy didn't look at the man.

"Well," the man said, "I seen you got a long face. Chin up, son."

Andy stared at the napkin dispenser.

"I know you," the rancher-type said.

"I don't think so."

"I think so. Mind if I sit?" And he sat across the table from Andy without waiting for a yes or no. The man smiled and folded his hands on the tabletop. They were chubby hands with red fingers, the left ring finger sporting a dinged up wedding band. The thin skin around his eyes wrinkled when he smiled. He looked like a grandpa. Maybe he wanted to sell oatmeal. Andy put the coffee cup down on the table. He'd just swigged off the dregs.

"I didn't say for you to sit."

"I know it."

Andy glared. The man gazed.

"My name's Clark, Ted Clark." The man didn't offer his hand for a shake.

"Okay."

"And you are?"

"Han Solo."

Clark chuckled, signaled to the waitress and when she came to the table, he pointed at Andy's cup. She went away, then came back with more coffee.

"Maybe I should tell you what I do," Clark said.

"Maybe. Maybe go fuck yourself."

"I'm a Maricopa County Sheriff's Deputy." Clark's hands stayed folded, his smile warm and pleasant, lifting his mustache in the corners of his mouth.

"So?"

"Your face is all over the news. Not to mention your description on all the law radios in Arizona. And not to mention," and here Clark pointed toward the window, "the description of that little old ride you got parked out in the parking lot."

Andy looked down, the white plate smeared purple from the blueberry pie slices. Clark took off his hat. His dark gray hair was greased. He spread his thumb and forefinger apart across and down the sides of his mustache.

"Why'd you do it, son?"

"Do what? What the fuck are you talking about?"

"You ain't some sort of dangerous criminal, else you wouldn't have let yourself get found so easy. What made you hit the bank?" The voice was peaceful, calming, almost overwhelming. A cool canyon breeze from across the table. And Clark's eyes. They had a shine, a sparkle. Life. They loved.

"You got sick family? Debts you ain't settled? Not drugs, is it?"

"Fun, I guess." The words slipped out of Andy's mouth almost before they clicked in his brain and he realized as soon as he heard himself say them that they were right. It was like a gong going off deep in his soul. "Yeah, fun."

"Help me understand, son. Armed robbery, and it's a financial institution now so that makes things federal, but armed robbery is a kick for you?"

"Yeah." Andy looked at Clark's face, then down. He shrugged, then spread his arms out wide. "That's all I can think of. Fun. I did it for fun."

"Like a thrill."

"Yeah, like a thrill."

They were both quiet, Clark watching Andy and Andy, head in hand now, watching the coffee slosh around as he swirled his cup.

Finally, Clark said, "You know, they got things like parachute clubs. Hang gliding. Race cars."

Andy looked up. Clark was smiling. They both laughed then, low laughter, chuckles that blended in with the talk all around them, talk which rose with the coffee steam and cigarette smoke and the smell of frying bacon, eggs, potatoes.

"Well," Clark said.

"Well."

"I guess you know I got a job to do now."

Andy stared at his coffee cup. "Yeah."

"I'm sorry, son."

"It's okay."

Clark unfolded his hands, put them palms down on the table. He said, "I'd really think—"

He didn't finish. Couldn't. The last bullet cut through his gut, blasted out his kidney, bored through the wood of the booth, popped through the wrist of a blue haired lady sitting the next booth over, angled up and thunked into the plaster wall. Little white shards went spinning. Under the table, Andy's hand was shaking so bad he dropped the gun. It clunked off his boot and settled in the shadows next to some torn up Equal packets. Clark pitched forward onto the table with a grunt.

His fingers moved like he was trying to grab something, grab anything. Then his arm twitched and a peppershaker went flying. The blue haired lady was screaming in pulses of noise— up and down and up and down went her voice. Andy jumped to his feet and backed away from the table, mouth hanging open, eyes wide and round as the rim of the coffee cup. A puddle of blood was spreading between Clark's boots and the blue haired lady had fallen onto the floor and turned onto her back, kicking like a cockroach. She scooted over the linoleum like a cockroach too and her hand was limp, dragging along behind her gray and loose as she wiggled along. Clark tried to stand, couldn't, then fidgeted and grunted again. His hands relaxed and quit moving altogether. The lady moved past Andy, swimming over the floor backstroke style, blood laid out like strings floating on the tiles in her wake. He took a big step back. Then another and another, until he banged into a table and fell into a fat cowboy's lap. The fat cowboy looked at him, smooth jowls trembling, and Andy jumped back to his feet. Nobody moved. Nothing but stares. A phone beeped. Somebody hiccupped. The chimes above the door tinkled.

"Oh my—," the waitress said, and the rest of her words trailed off.

--

Paul Luikart is a student in Seattle Pacific University's MFA in creative writing program. His work has appeared in *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Curbside Splendor*, and *Pacifica Literary Review*, among others. He's been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Sundress Publication's *Best of the Net* anthology, and one of his stories was recently short-listed for the Able Muse Write Prize. By the time you read this, his wife may have given birth to their second daughter (Due November 8th, 2013).



# LALA IS NOT REAL

Jerry Renek

A bullshit name on purpose. I spoke her name in our dryer moments to make Chloe fake jealous, because she knew Lala personally and had in fact concocted the name.

“Lala would’ve scooted over here five minutes ago to kiss me.”

“Scoot over here if that’s what you want,” Chloe said.

“Lala wouldn’t say that.”

“I would.” I moved closer by half a cushion. On the TV, a starlet cocked a revolver. “I’m going to kill you now,” she said to her star leading man in top hat and tails.

“You won’t, Gloria my darling,” he said. “I won’t let you. I love you, Gloria.”

Gloria swayed across the dark-papered Paris hotel room, swinging her hips starlet-like, and raised the barrel to his brow. “How much?” she said. “*How much* do you love me?”

Chloe said, “Let him eat lead. No calories in that shit.”

“This much,” he said, opening his arms, smacking her hand. The picture cut to a slow-motion track of the spinning airborne gun. The man’s hand reached into view, caught it by the grip, and—wide shot—aimed at his Gloria.

“Damn bitch hesitated,” Chloe said. “Never hesitate, bitch.” Chloe’s script would have read: *Man confesses his love. Man eats machine gun lead. Three thousand holes. Pop-pop-pop-pop.*

Gloria laughed as the man squeezed the trigger. Pop-pop. Pop. “Blanks,” she said. “I know you too well. Now, let us dispense with this diversion.” He backhanded the gun through the open veranda door. “Honey, you still get to me,” and they smooched through the fade-out.

“Bitch,” I agreed, and clicked off the TV with the remote. “The last thing I said to her... to Lala, is ‘Do you enjoy being an asshole?’ I didn’t mean it.”

Chloe said, “*Enough.*” She’d already begun to jam her feet into her hiking boots. She kicked out one of the coffee table’s legs, the one already broken a dozen times before, delivering magazines to the floor, and she hiked out the door. She revved the engine a few times, then backed out fast, chirping the tires. The tank was half full. If she pleased, she had enough gas to drive between the Sahara and Tropicana well into the afternoon.

I called Lala’s unreal San Diego number so it would show on our bill. A recording said the number was no longer in service or I had dialed incorrectly,

please dial again. I tried five more random 619s until someone answered. "Lala," I said. "It's me. Thinking about you."

"Sounds nice but."

Into a gym bag I stuffed two days' ration of clean clothes, called for a cab, then called the cab company again, told them to pick me up instead at Mel's Pub and Mini-Casino, because if Chloe came back, if she'd changed her mind about going, and found me packed... I dropped my phone conspicuously on the couch and walked the three blocks to Las Vegas Boulevard then four blocks west, to Mel's. Heat rose from the pavement, inducing fifty floor casinos to shiver. Window AC units buzzed white noise in cheap rooms. A man watched me from a dozen flights up. When he lifted his arms, stretching to the top edge of the window, I waved to him because I thought he was waving to me. Then his shirt rose off his body, magic or illusion, over his head, slowly, levitating up and up. As he closed the curtain, I caught sight of a woman behind him folding the shirt.

At Mel's, I sucked in the cool, smoky air—no oxygen pumped in here—and, understanding the obstacles I'd created, bet my only hundred on red. A loss would have sent me home. I won and had an ice water before the cab came, honking.

"Drive slow," I said to the driver. "Need a minute to think about chasing after Chloe."

He adjusted his mirror to catch my eyes.

I said, "I need a minute to think about her. I tried to lose all my money, so I could quit."

"She's perfect, kid."

He could've been my age, qualified to comprehend bullshit. "Sorry. I'm feeling lucky at the Palace today. Almost my lunch break. Got to get you there quick." He made a dice-shaking gesture.

"Then drive like lightning, sir. And good luck to you."

"Same to you, kid."

I bought a ticket to San Diego.

The bus was mostly filled with serviceman and seniors retiring back to mobile homes. To keep the sun from hitting me directly when we started west, I picked a pair of empty seats on the left side. To keep stragglers from sitting with me, I dumped my bag in the window seat. Opposite mine, on the right side of the bus, a father and daughter sat silently, weary with budget travel. The father, eyes closed, looked fatigued, like he'd been drinking all morning, even with the kid to care for. The girl, in the window seat, wore white jeans with Peace patches over both knees and pink-framed eyeglasses with flip-up sunglasses. She had short, straight blonde hair. Her T-shirt said, "I lost it all in Las Vegas." She shared her seat with a stuffed

bear, *Circus Circus* embroidered into its belly.

When she smiled at me I said, "How're you doing, miss?"

"Fine. You?" She flipped down the sunglasses with her middle finger. She might have been seven or eight.

The father opened his eyes.

"How'd you do? You win?" I said.

"Came out even," he said. "But *she* cost me fifty to win that bear." He closed his eyes again, like he had been talking in his sleep, neither amused nor disappointed.

"I like your T-shirt," I said to the girl.

"Don't. It's dumb." She went to staring out the window. I did the same, wishing for Chloe. *Lala would not make me ride in this*, I thought. I watched the desert dash by. Yucca yucca yucca.

I woke with the girl in my window seat, my bag dropped to the floor. I'd slept two hours, Barstow now minutes away. "You're a heavy sleeper," she said, sunglasses up. "I kept saying 'Hey' but you kept sleeping. You drool, too."

"I dreamed about you and didn't want to wake up, even with the embarrassment of spittle. You're apparently very, very interesting."

"You don't know me." The stuffed bear had been left in her vacant seat. The father slept on, open-mouthed.

"I know plenty. Your bear told me everything in my dream."

"Like what? Huh?"

"Like, let me see. Like you live in a beige L.A. condo with purple gargoyles, and your dad over there is a trillionaire who busses you all over America to all the greatest cities, like Las Vegas and Dodge City and Boise and San Juan Capistrano *and* Missoula. And your mom is the Princess of Canada, so she's always doing her royal duties and can't go on these trips. And you, miss, are the shortest woman Vegas has ever seen. And they've seen plenty. You know? You are the shortest person anyone has ever seen."

"I'm not *that* short."

"Are too, don't argue. And the bear is so happy to have you as a traveling companion he wants to kiss you."

"Ohh." She climbed across me and reached past the father for the bear. She bumped him but he didn't stir. Standing in the aisle, she kissed and kissed the bear, crushing its face to hers, making big smacking sounds.

An old lady turned in her seat. "You cute little girl." The girl gave her a savage stare as she sat with me again.

"Old bag," I whispered.

"No kidding. What's a gargoyle?"

"A fake monster that protects you. You got any cards?" I said.

"Don't gamble. *Too young*," quoting the father, I assumed.

Our bus eased off the interstate in Barstow. "Look where we are. Barstow. I think I'll get off here for the day."

She squeezed my arm, anxious like I'd told her for real I had rats in my bag.

"That's a bum. Well, what else did the bear say?"

"What?"

"In your dream, dunce."

"The bear. Yes, the bear, madam. He said your name is Gloria Hawaii... and Geometry Botch is his name. However, I suspect he may be using a nom de plume."

"What's your name?"

"Nunivak."

"What?"

"Nunivak."

"Noony."

"I'll allow that pronunciation. Anyway, Geometry Botch said he's king of *all* the universe, except for the larger Canadian provinces which legally belong to your mom. This is okay by him; he's not a lover of tundra or hockey. And he said you're his frightfully witty and short—*don't interrupt*—supershort companion from Venus, and you two have extra adult-looking heads on your spaceship. You use this spaceship to sneak into casinos near the Big Dipper, where the Intergalactic vice squad doesn't hassle you. You pop your brains into these heads and pop them on your neck. Pop pop. And you gamble for years... since years in Big Dipper Standard Time take about three Earth hours. But *you* know that? Well, one time Gee-Bo, as his friends call him, said you won so much cash you danced up huge storms, and your knees spun and your fake heads spun but didn't come off. They spun like tops. Everyone got so mad at you because you made a billion black holes. They chased you, but you got your brains and made it back to your ship, then you went for burgers in Chicago. Massive chili burgers. This big, bigger than our bus."

"It's all true, Noony."

"I know, lady. Bears tell no lies." Together we eyed Geometry Botch, teller of truths.

She got serious again, squeezing each of my fingers separately, and she whispered, "Noony, I bet Gee-Bo didn't tell you about him." She pointed at the father. "He's not my dad."

"Really?" We still whispered.

"I'm so serious. He kidnapped me. Two years ago, from my back yard. I didn't know him until he stole me. For sure he isn't my dad. He takes me on the bus all



over the place. We have apartments in Lincoln, Nashville, Flagstaff and Pomona.”

“Lovely cities.”

“He hides me from the police when they come to make him pay his parking tickets.”

“Parking tickets? He treat you good?” I said, and she gave me her hardest stare. “You’re kidnapped. Is that the case?”

“Can you take me home?” She was serious.

I wasn’t convinced. “What’s in it for me? Do I get a ride on your spaceship?”

She made that frustrated sigh children make when they have to make one last, unnecessary effort. She stood on the seat, leaned close, put her mouth to my ear. “My picture was on the news on TV.” And I believed her completely, seeing the grainy copy of Gloria Hawaii’s second grade photo with her sunglasses flipped up, the head of a stuffed bear peeking up at the bottom of the frame, the newscaster’s pleading for information before skipping to a story about soccer riots. *Do I remember that story?* I thought.

I looked at the father to see if he was sleeping or pretending to sleep. Gloria Hawaii breathed close to my ear. I opened my bag, saw my toy gun and handcuffs, and zipped the bag shut again.

At the bus station the driver called out, “Ten minutes,” and most of the servicemen and incontinent debussed. A few people, like the father, slept on. He snuffed hard. Old people up and down the bus snuffed. I thought about breaking out the window and running, or strangling the father unconscious, or sticking Gloria and her bear back in their seat and forgetting. However, the plan I chose was to take her off the bus and, after the bus left, call the police. The police would pick him up at the next stop, and I’d do a couple news interviews, maybe get on TV myself. Chloe would love it.

I carried my bag and Geometry Botch. She took her jacket, nothing else. We went into the bus station. I bought bottled sodas and we took a bench away from the crowd.

“This is exciting,” she said, her sunglasses down, incognito.

“No. Yes, I guess so.”

“I’m being kidnapped all over again.”

“Shit. *Shit.*”

“Shit.” She drank half her soda and smiled at me with the bottle still at her lip.

I thought about calling the police before the bus left, on the chance the father did wake, but the two payphones were taken by a pair of teen runts in leather jackets. They were talking to one another, laughing at the same moments. I said, “Quit playing with the phones.” They pretended to not hear me.

I said, "Where you from originally?"

"New Jersey," as if there were also an Old Jersey.

"What's your real name?"

"Gloria Pluto Venus Mars San Juan Capistrano."

The bus driver went inside the bus, started it, then stepped back down, soaking sun. I saw the father through the tinted windows, sun hitting him directly.

*He's going to wake up and I'm going to jail.*

Passengers filed back, the driver punching tickets.

"Bus is leaving," I said.

"Hmmm?" She seemed confused.

"We just wait until the bus leaves. He's still asleep. When he's gone, we're safe. Two minutes."

She picked up her bear and jacket. "No. Wait. Give me some money."

"I don't... Why?"

"Please. Money." I thought she wanted to know if I could care for her, so I opened my wallet and gave her ten. Her hands shook. In her eyes I found sincerity. She would certainly cry which would cause a scene which would delay the bus which would surely turn horrific. I'd be pummelled by the sailors and soldiers, professional pummellers. I gave her the cash, the full hundred thirty.

"Now will you *please* calm down? Sit. He'll be gone in a minute. And then it's all over."

"No! Come on, Geometry Botch." She kissed me on the cheek. When I caught her arm she bit my hand, bit it hard, and swung the bear at my face. The plastic nose hit my lip. With that, she was free and out the door.

"Wait, Gloria." She pulled her bus ticket from her jacket and tucked my cash into the front pocket of her jeans. The bus driver pretended to stamp the bear's ticket. Inside the bus, she woke her father by climbing onto his lap. They laughed, and she punched him with the rear end of Geometry Botch, where no plastic nose might bruise his lip. He let her pummel him, tossing his smiling head from side to side with each blow.

I said, "What about the TV?" but I'd been duped. It was over that fast, except for my hands not working and my heart wanting to not work. She had her game; I had Lala. I think. What I felt was sorrow at the quality of games I had to play. I didn't cry, but I mustered up some noises that could have been cries. People watched me making these noises, they only watched. I rubbed my eyes red. The bump on my lip was nothing.

Because the phones were still taken by the leather runts, I took my bag, headed out, and tried to remember what I liked about Barstow. I liked a taco stand though I'd never tried their tacos. I liked a car repair shop where I pretended to know the mechanics by name. Rick, Julio, Albert. I liked the old turquoise hotel

with only one car in the lot. I walked, imagining myself lost. Without much conviction I thought, *Lala wouldn't let me get lost.*

The houses I passed had their windows shut and curtained. All had desert landscaping or dead grass. In some people laughed loudly, and I thought they were behind the drapes laughing *with* me. Air conditioners buzzed a pacifying white noise.

Ten minutes later I came to the bridge overlooking the former train depot. I crossed this bridge, over the dozens of switching tracks. The worn, gutted building looked as if a train hadn't passed through in twenty or thirty years, aged because of the small-town graffiti. Green and red and black spray-paint declarations of love and pathetic imitations of city gang markings. A seemingly functional office was unmanned and locked, perhaps Barstow's hope that one day passenger trains may again have reason to stop. Outside the office, the public phone had been torn from the stucco wall. Frayed, striped wires flowered out from the hole where the phone had been.

Barely visible beneath a white-washed board, the schedule said Los Angeles train would arrive at 1:28 P.M., in twenty minutes. The Vegas train, the train back home, in three hours. I decided to wait it out, stretch out on the shaded bench under the depot platform, give me some thinking time.

Lala was not real because she had no particulars, the insignificant things that make someone real. What color shoes did she wear? Did she like to brush her hair always on one side first? Did she crave food with too much garlic just so she could have garlic breath? Was she afraid of stuffed bears? Gloria Hawaii had the T-shirt, the stare, the TV appearance, the guts. Chloe kicked broken coffee tables with her hiking boots. Gloria Hawaii's scheme had been to seek attention elsewhere in this extraordinary way only a kid would. I couldn't correct how I felt about her swindle. My own swindles are what I had right then. Lala, who was not real, had hauled me here.

An old man in an old truck drove up, stopped with his fender over the tracks.

I said to him, "I wanted to make a call, but the phone's gone." I pointed to the phone's former location, where right above someone had written *ANARCHY*. "There were two punks in leather at the bus station. I bet they did it."

"Kids come along once a month, break it off the wall," he said. "I don't know why they do it. Scavenger hunt, maybe."

I knew. He knew. They break things for fun, as a release, as a way to feel, a substitute until later when breaking is done equally for cruelty and love.

"No train today. Where you going?"

"I need to make a call first," I said.

"I got a telephone in the office you can use. Have to call collect."

In the Barstow train depot I called Chloe. She didn't answer, not that she was

supposed to. Because the old man was watching me through the office window I gave him a thumbs-up, and he looked away.

He waited for me on the platform, suspiciously eyeing the spot where the missing phone had been. "Heading south or north?"

"Don't have money to go anywhere. Looks like I'm staying. This isn't a bad town, is it?" We had our hands down in our pockets, shoulders shrugged in feigned chills, as strangers do. The sun was still far from gone.

"Nice, quiet town," he said.

"I do like it. Probably."

"Where you staying? You can't sleep around here. They'll hurt you."

"I'm staying at that turquoise place." Chloe and I had used the turquoise motel the last time, the time before that and every other time. When we needed something besides my Lala.

"Which one?"

"Cactus something." I pointed in a general direction.

"California Cactus Motel."

"Yep, that's the one." I'd passed it an hour ago, when I'd stood in the parking lot and stared at Chloe's filthy car, "warsh me" written with her finger on the rear window. She was waiting for me in room #4, as always. The curtain parted a few inches, as always. She was waiting with her own toy gun cocked.

I heaved up my bag, but instead of hiking back across the bridge, I crossed track after track, twenty, thirty, then climbed the ladder of a decaying freight car to see what I could see, to see what I might pretend to remember.

The old man finger whistled, a magnificent whistle that startled me and gave me purpose again. The tone echoed and filled the expanse like the whistle of an incoming train, the one bound for LA and then San Diego.

Five hundred people got off that train that wasn't there, greeting friends, family, lovers, moms and dads, Barstow's greatest and finest. Sailors kissed wives. Soldiers saluted crying babies. Then the train went on out. The old man was still there on the platform, hands still in pockets. He'd already forgotten me and was watching up the tracks for the next one.

--

Jerry Renek's work has appeared in *Other Voices*, *Absolute Disaster: Fiction From Los Angeles*, and *McSweeney's*. He co-wrote the screenplay to the award-winning short film "Max Neptune & The Menacing Squid." Jerry is a Witstream "Aristocrat" and a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He lives and teaches in Iowa City.



# FOUR IMPOSSIBLE OBJECTS

Norman Lock

13.

There is a house where only soup is served. In each soup spoon, a hole is bored. What are they if not memento mori – reminders that dignity is, in the end, the prerogative and pose of undertakers?

14.

To slow light so that it becomes too weak to bend its beams onto the point where all vanishes required no other intervention than to resurface the inside of a spyglass barrel with a light-retardant substance comprised mainly of pitch. Now light streams in all its particles and waves onward into time, like train rails too weary to converge. And in the far distance where once sight crowded, the dead are seen to stand as if in a doorway or an opened grave.

15.

Imagine a hinge that on its axis swings beyond what was thought to be the threshold of the possible, where the world may be moved as Archimedes dreamed as if it were no more ponderous than a pear, whose shape (divine, for some) resembles Earth's own. When twisted, it will let go its stay against gravity to fall – pleasantly – into the palm of one's hand.

16.

A telegraph key such as reported the Sepoy mutiny or Wounded Knee's disgrace or, say, Titanic's foundering can be modified so that darkness, sudden and complete, will – with a nervous click – befall all the earth in the manner that water quenches light when a flaming ship slides down the ways to icy death.

--

Norman Lock is the author of story collections, novels, novellas, stage and radio plays, including *A History of the Imagination* (FC2), *Pieces for Small Orchestra & Other Fictions* (Spuyten Duyvil), and, most recently, *Love Among the Particles* (Bellevue Literary Press). His absurdist drama, *The House of Correction* (Broadway Play Publishing Co.), played in Istanbul during the 2013 season; his newest radio play, *Mounting Panic*, premiered this year on WDR, Germany. His installation art scenarios appear regularly at *Visual Artbeat* Magazine, Austria. His new novel, *The Boy in His Winter* will be issued by Bellevue Literary Press in May and his booklength poem, *In the Time of Rat*, is due shortly from Ravenna Press. Lock has received The Paris Review Aga Kahn Prize for Fiction and fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (2009), the New Jersey Council on the Arts (1999, 2013), and the National Endowment for the Arts (2011). The four texts published here are from *Impossible Objects*, published by Ravenna Press. More at [normanlock.com](http://normanlock.com).

# AUTUMN MORNING, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

Norman Waksler

The museum is quiet. You've come at an relatively unfrequented hour mid-week, taken a day off work. Sometimes things happen, and you have to get away from friends, family, colleagues, your lover, escape complicated interdependencies where there's always a chance that a miss-step could drop you into a momentary crisis that will need explanation, clarification, rectification — the contingency in other words underlying all human interaction. The museum's the place. With paintings the contingency is all yours. They always remain the same, you just have to give yourself up and meet them.

You wander, and after a while plant in front of a Whistler "Nocturne". *Blue and Silver: The Lagoon, Venice*. Deep night, blackness of bare-masted sailing ship, ghostly gondolas, slim black bell tower, black dome, bubbles of gold on land and lagoon, and, as advertised, deepest silver-blue/bluish-silver sky and water. A perfect paradigm of melancholy solitude. The museum viewer could just as easily be a disconsolate Venetian standing on a bridge in the dark escaping his sense of the complications of interdependency.

A woman's voice behind you, "Jim," aimed at your back. Funny how you know that. However your name is Barry. Nonetheless you turn. It's almost unavoidable. A voice directed at you, not your name, but still you turn, with the inescapable illusion that maybe the voice means you anyway.

A woman in her late twenties perhaps, with the build of a Gothic saint, strikingly thin, a large sharp nose, sharp cheekbones and wristbones, black hair in coils of curls, black slacks — every woman seemed to be wearing black slacks this season — a hip length top in deep ultramarine blue. All that and a smile — an affectionate happy-to-have-come-across-you-Jim smile, mixed with tender concern, as if something has happened to Jim and she isn't sure how it's affected him.

Of course as soon as she sees, not that it's you, Barry, but that it's someone not Jim, away goes the smile. Then she's a bony faced woman with too thin lips and some blend of disappointment and embarrassment.

You try a smile of your own. Not a come-on. It's, Hi, contact, another human

being here, let's acknowledge mutual existence. And also: I recognize your embarrassment, sympathize, am unoffended by your mistake, understand.

That kind of a smile.

But she just turns up the far ends of her mouth, one of those movements that are all voluntary muscles, and veers off across the gallery on practical rubber soled black shoes.

You feel badly for her disappointment, even a little responsible, as though you could have been Jim if I you wanted and have perversely chosen to be Barry. You try hearing again how she said Jim. Not a question. Jim, is that you? Not expected: a flat, Jim. More surprise and pleasure. Jim! You? Here? How nice! You wonder who he is exactly, old friend long missing? ex-lover? one time possible lover in an unconsummated affair?.

You wish you could have been Jim for her, for your sake too. The pleasure of being found, of being smiled on, of knowing someone is delighted to come across you isn't granted very often. Even though your long time lover and you are usually happy together, though you're generally satisfied in your work, are only occasionally disgusted with yourself, things you've done, people's responses to them, you could always use a treat like that. Oh, well. Just another urban encounter. Birds of a different feather meet on a tree branch and fly off in different directions. Back to *Nocturne: Blue and Silver*.

You can look at a painting forever, you know, if you care for it enough. It just stays there and lets you. Eventually the museum closes, but that's not the painting's fault. So ten minutes later you're still looking when you hear behind you another woman's voice, jolly and excited, "Hey! Robby!" Theoretically too loudly for the quiet gallery.

You turn, more slowly this time, amused but dubious. Could this be happening again? Apparently so. Another woman, another smile. She's short, mid-thirties, ruddy as a Hals tippler, untidy hair in shades of cadmium yellow; a scarlet Henley shirt hanging over baggy black pants; big running shoes; a general air of rough and readiness, as though she's just rolled a bowling ball and as soon as the pins decide where to land, she'll roll another one. The smile: someone who's come upon a drinking buddy already beers ahead in a bar and she anticipates a happy evening of competitive catching up.

The smile immediately replaced by the sort of lip crumple consequent on biting into a banana and finding it's a plantain. "But what the heck, you're not Robby."

"Well, not this week, at least." You attempt a convivial smile meant to say, "This is an odd little encounter, hey, but you seem likeable, I'm likeable too, so let's



acknowledge each other's likeability, and while we're at it, the harmless humor of all this."

Possibly your smile doesn't convey exactly what you mean it to, because she raises her left hand, short fingers, many rings, palm outward: a warding off gesture. She turns and hustles off across the gallery, an odd right slant to her body, as though cradling a bowling ball at her side.

You think it excessive of her to act as though you've made a crude pick-up attempt. "Well, pardon me," you mutter "for not being Robby." But you understand what's ruffled your feathers: You've acknowledged her likeability; she's denied yours. A merry old soul she is, just not with an imposter like you.

You know it's foolish to resent. An encounter of that kind with a stranger, that sort of immediate reaction, doesn't mean anything. The other person doesn't know you. It's just the circumstances, nothing to make you feel badly about yourself, nothing real.

But that 'back off' gesture. People use it on religious nuts and street hustlers. You wonder if you're looking less normal from the front than the back, off-key, out of focus, because obviously your back view must've been just like Robby's, and Jim's. You're wearing dark blue chinos, black shoes, a blue striped oxford shirt, your hair cut short, with a few streaks of gray. Medium height, posture straight, shoulders back. You have no idea how common this is. Perhaps there are styles in men's backs, a set of three or four types that made each group indistinguishable within itself and explains how you could be mistaken for someone else, twice. Perhaps other people have passed and not seen you as a Donald or a Fred or a Sam because their backs were from groups one, two and four.

You try to shake off discontent, return to the picture, but you've lost touch with it. Think of moving on, obstinately decide to remain, and after a few minutes begin to regain that state of aesthetic balance where you and the painting seem to be in a silent bubble together.

"Tom!"

You absolutely refuse to turn around.

"Tom!" Insistent, demanding, assertive.

You stay firmly in place facing *Nocturne: Blue and Silver*, though your back and shoulders stiffen the way they did when you were afraid of being hit by a snowball in winter as you walked home from school late afternoon.

A light perfume almost too delicate to be sure you smell it, a small hand on your arm, and you're pulled sideways. "Tom, what is your problem? ... You're not Tom!"

This is an extremely elegant, extremely beautiful, extremely angry woman.

Her black slacks lines by Matisse, her short sleeved blouse as simple as a parochial school girl's except that it's pearl gray silk, a pendent of two twists of thin silver indicates her cleavage. Her pale blonde hair is cut in one of those inexplicably self-maintaining sideways sweeps, and she has perfect cheekbones, an exquisite jaw line, and an odd little flat spot on the bridge of her nose that allows you to finally understand the notion of the exception that proves the rule.

At any other time her looks would reduce you to stuttering masculine idiocy as you tried to demonstrate what a brilliant and virile specimen you were, worthy to mate with her immediately behind the first sarcophagus you could find.

Now however you say, "That's right, and that's the exact reason I didn't turn around when you called the name 'Tom'."

"But you knew I was talking to you. It was simply rude of you not to respond."

She has her fists on her hips and appears to be gearing up for a long and serious fight about the rules of politeness in force when two strangers encounter one another. She strikes me as the type who'd crash her car into yours if you tried to scoop her parking place. You say, "Excuse me, but I'm not responsible for your errors of identification. If you can't tell your friend Tom from any other guy, maybe ..."

She's not listening to you, or looking at you, any longer. Her gaze has shifted over your shoulder. "Ah. Tom," she says. You glance back and see through the doorway to the next gallery a blue clad leg just going out of sight. The woman steps past you, the imperceptible perfume fluttering under your nostrils, and she crosses the gallery with a restrained pacing horse swiftness, disappears into the next.

You feel curiously deprived, not of her looks, but of the argument the two of you were about to have. Undischarged anger of course, but more than that. She at least has paid attention to you. If you weren't worthy to mate with, at least you were worth a fight. But not in comparison to catching up with Tom. Tom, Robby, Jim. All of them more important than you. Well, sure. Naturally. You're a momentary stranger. But these things leave their mark anyway, and that deadly duo, anger and depression, stand between you and the painting, an *oscuro* without *chiaro*. You eye *Nocturne* dully, inhumanly, as if it's nothing more than splotches of color on some treated cloth.

"Barry?"

Once again you refuse to turn. It's no doubt some other Barry required here, and you're not going to be tricked into making a fool of yourself with eager response followed by yet another repulse.

"Barry? Is that you?" A dry, not very penetrating woman's voice, footsteps,

flap, flap, flap, then the voice off to your side. “It is you. Have you gone deaf?”

Cautiously you sneak your eyes leftward. A tall, slouch-shouldered woman; a face with the long practicality of a Winslow Homer fisherman; loose black pants, hard and serviceable, as if she’s about to bait a line, and they’re meant to protect her from hooks, as is her sand colored two-pocket shirt. Bifocals, no make-up, her hair, gathered into a loose pony tail, mostly gray. In short, your cousin Belinda — second cousin once removed that is, on your mother’s side. Ten years older than you, a reserved, overly critical individual, she’s never been one of your favorite relatives. Though you two share certain political and social views, there’s always been some tension between you, that kind of unspoken familial dissonance that arises as much from difference in temperament as from outlook on the way one should live.

But you break into an enormous smile, hook your arm through hers and say, “Belinda, you have no idea how glad I am to see you.”

She says harshly, “I heard that you...”

“Yes, yes. But please, let’s leave it for later. Just tell me, what do you think of this painting?”

Turning our backs to the world at large, we face *Nocturne: Blue and Silver* and stare in silence together a while before beginning to share impressions.

--

Norman Waksler has published fiction in a number of journals, most recently, *Epicenter*, *The Tidal Basin Review*, *The Valparaiso Fiction Review*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Thickjam*, and *Scholars and Rogues*. His most recent story collection, *Signs of Life*, is published by the Black Lawrence Press. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. His website is [NormanWakslerFiction.com](http://NormanWakslerFiction.com)

# BANG, BANG, BLOOD AND SUFFOCATION

Kevin Weidner

I hadn't been inside a church in maybe twenty years, but when I drove by the parish sign advertising renovation work at St. Aquinas' I figured why the hell not, work is work. I pulled up to the rectory office, gave my name inside, and they told me to show up Monday morning.

At home, though, I started feeling like a liar. The nice lady had not asked me if I belong to that parish, or if I was even a practicing Catholic. Maybe it didn't matter. Still, she hadn't asked me when was my last confession or my last eucharist, or did I currently have any mortal sins weighing, unaccounted for, on my soul. She had not bothered to check, even, if I had any goodness at all in this heart of mine. I felt really bad about this. If she had asked, I would have been compelled, Catholic-guilt and all even for the strayed sheep, to tell her no, I grew up, sure enough, a county over and no, truth be told, I had not practiced anything of the sort in years. I would have been made to say I couldn't remember my last confession, nor the last time my filthy tongue had touched the dry wafer of holy flesh. Admittedly, I would not have told her of the weights on my soul, tarnished as it was like siding in need of a good powerwash—maybe rotted like a fish pulled from water and left on hot summer asphalt—but I would, probably, have insisted on some deeper goodness still present in my heart, like roadkill not yet entirely ruined. Alas, alas.

We are all, all of us, God's children, is what I grew up hearing, and He loves us all, though somewhere along the way I'd got the sense of being loved a little less. Things just hadn't gone right for a while. There were deaths, and terrible ones at that. My father, a Conservation Officer, had been shot dead by deer hunters he was tracking for illegal hunting in the offseason. My good friend buried alive, and suffocated, in a corn bin at the ethanol plant. Jobs, you might imagine, started seeming very dangerous to me after that. Take also the loneliness. Guttled, I was, after Sally left, because of the cheating on Sally with the court clerk, who I met, incidentally, because of the burglary charges and, you see, this goes on.

So I needed the job whether I was feeling guilty about it or not.

We were taking a break from hauling wooden pews out of the church and one of the men I was working with told us a story.

He'd been fishing down in the Ozarks last month with his son and daughter. He said they do this every summer, they rent a campsite and take his little Bass Tracker and troll the edges of a mountain lake. Well, he said, it had been two days and they'd got exactly nothing. "Not so much as a bite," he said. The three of them were getting frustrated out there on the water. The sun was hot, striking off the surface of the lake, and it didn't help that the summer speedboating crowd was out making wakes in the middle. "Everyone was on edge," he said, meaning him, his son, his daughter. He considered pulling up the trolling motor, gunning back to the dock, and going to the grocery for salmon filets or tuna steaks to put on the grill.

He paused the story here and said, "Boy there's really nothing like grilled salmon with a little lemon pepper," and the other men nodded and said, "Yup," and "Amen to that." Myself, I was curious, sure, about where the story was going—who doesn't like a good story?—but I had not taken a real liking to these men, not yet. The three of them, I could tell, were men of the church—not priests, I don't mean—but the churchgoing type with perfect little children—probably two each, a boy and girl, and probably named Joseph and Mary, too—and the prettiest wives you could find, but not the kind of women who would put out, the kind of women I have wasted half my life chasing. Alas, and poor me. No, these men stirred something in me.

"Well, anyway," Sam said and continued the story. He said he caught himself getting worked up out there and he knew his kids would start picking up on this, taking his cues, so he talked himself down. Sam, he said he said to himself, now this is quality time you're spending with your kids and what does it matter if you catch anything at all. So he calmed himself down a bit and told his kids it was time for a few quiet moments. And in those quiet moments, Sam said, he said a quiet little prayer to God, he said, God I sure appreciate the time I'm getting to spend with my kids, but just to make sure they're enjoying it too, could you help us out with a bite or two.

At this point Sam paused for effect. I was very skeptical about the direction of this fishing story.

"Well, what do you know," Sam said, "not five minutes later my little Mary caught a smallmouth the size of her head. So that just goes to show." Sam trailed off, leaving the other men nodding.

And that was it. That was the story Sam told.

I got pretty pissed about that and said, "Sam, what the hell is that supposed to mean?"

He raised his eyebrows. He was surprised, you see. "What?" he said.

"What are you getting at?" I said. "You think you're better than us?"

"What? No, I just..." He stammered, trying to make sense. The other two were quiet, watching the both of us. "I just thought it was a nice story to share."

"Dammit, Sam," I said. "It's not a competition."

"No, of course not," he said. He paused. "Wait, how do you mean?"

"You think you're better than us because God reached down and shoved a damn bass on your girl's hook."

"No of course I don't!" he said.

"I thought it was a fine story," Terry said, rubbing his arm.

"Shut up, Terry," I said.

I turned back to Sam. He had a look on his face like his dog just died, the look that's sad but trying to hide it because dammit, it's just a dog. I felt bad. What did I care about this man and his kids and a smallmouth?

"Ah, screw it," I said. "Let's get back to it."

We worked more on emptying the church of pews, the sun coming down and shining into the stained glass on the west wall of the church where Jesus lugged that big cross endlessly. We all worked in silence mostly, the mood having shifted into something more personal and introspective, I guess everybody thinking about what had happened on break, and what it meant for them. Maybe they were all just angry with me, the outsider, for having soured the mood.

Myself, I was reflecting on why I had got so pissed at Sam's story, other than the fact that it was meaningless and inconsequential, a solid waste of my time. I guessed it was a bit of jealousy, a feeling maybe I'd been hung out on the line and wanted to hear more stories like that, stories a man like me could relate to, not miracle fish and kid anglers and beautiful, prudish wives. Isn't a church a place for sad stories, for struggles? What else? Pilate sentences Christ to death and drags his cross all the way to the hill and then — right there on the wall for chrissake — the hammers, the cross. Bang, bang, blood and suffocation. Think about that.

And I did, for the rest of the afternoon.

After we called it, I asked Sam to get a drink with me. He hesitated, for obvious reasons, I suppose, then agreed. We went down to the Post. *Jeopardy!* was on the television and all the town's old mainstays crowded up at the bar on red leather stools. The men at the bar were all sorts. Ben the house painter with white splotches all over his painter's pants. Three retired men, Art, Danny, and Eugene — and Eugene in his denim overalls and sporting an orange Hawaiian shirt. A young gas station attendant everyone called Boob. And me, and Sam in his blue jeans and tucked-in shirt.

When we walked in the men were discussing one of the show's contestants.

"Computer systems specialist," Danny repeated when the contestants were



introduced.

"What in the hell is that?" Art said, and then, "Sorry, ladies," over his shoulder to the two middle-aged women in the back. I had not noticed them.

"No problem, honey," one said. I had seen them here a few times, maybe, but did not know their names.

"I'll tell you what—" Boob said from down at the end.

"Shut up, Boob, you fuck-up," Eugene said and Danny laughed.

"Sorry, ladies," Art said.

"No problem, honey," the same woman said.

"I've never been here before," Sam said when we bellied up.

"It's a good time," I said and ordered beers.

"He's got a tie on," Danny observed. "So we're talking business world."

"But short sleeves," Art said.

"What you make of that?" Danny said.

"Looks like an asshole to me," Eugene said.

"No problem, honeys," the woman said.

"Real businessmen wear long sleeves," Art said.

"What do you know about real businessmen?" Eugene said.

"I wear a tie to work," Boob said, from the end.

"Boob, so help me God—" Eugene said and stopped himself.

"What a place," Sam said. He shifted on his stool and brought his feet up to rest on the rungs.

"What do you think, buddy?" I said. I was trying to make nice, I think.

"I could maybe like it," he said.

I ordered more beers and the other men kept talking, harping on about businessmen and slick sonsofbitches, pausing occasionally to play along with the game. Sam, I could tell, was loosening up, even answering a question or two. Maybe he was beginning to come around.

"You know," he said, taking deliberate care with his words, "it's been a long time since I've been out on the town."

"Nicaragua," Boob said loudly.

"Fuck you, Boob, you couldn't find Nicaragua on a goddamned map," Eugene said. And this time Sam grinned, just a little, into his beer.

"It's what happens when you get yourself kids and a woman," I said. This was a truth I reminded myself often, a sort of consolation for my wearied and lonely self. At this point I was feeling good and drunk, feeling a bit better about what happened earlier.

"It isn't even true," Sam said.

"What's not?" I said.

"The story. I didn't go to the Ozarks this summer with my kids."

"No?"

He shook his head. "Elizabeth moved out and took the kids with her to Arizona."

Well fuck me sideways if that wasn't the best news I'd heard in a long time. Not for this poor man, no, losing his wife and his kids, that was terrible, but the implications of his lie were magnificent for me. Maybe we weren't so different, this man and me. Maybe we were in it for the same thing.

"Well Jesus Christ, Sam," I said, and for a moment he looked startled at the Good Lord's name. Then he smiled.

"Pretty bad, huh," he said.

I shook my head ferociously and felt so close to him in that moment that I immediately unloaded on him the more recent sins of my life, straight from this roadkill heart of mine. I told him about losing my job and taking up gambling, about burglarizing the old woman's fine china. I told him about the courthouse clerk and how she wanted me to fuck her in a judge's robe, and I did, how severely I administered her carnal justice, and how Sally left because of it. Then—justice! justice!—I slammed my drink and drug Sam out into the parking lot, whereupon I opened my trunk and showed him the several gold chalices I'd stolen, just earlier, from the church's sanctuary. He laughed, or he vomited there at his feet, and as soon as I'd unloaded all this on Sam, my heart—that ruinous, rotten thing—my heart rose up like an Easter sun, big, bright, and bloody.

--

Kevin Weidner hails from Missouri and currently lives in Tuscaloosa, where he received an MFA in prose from the University of Alabama. Work has appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *storySouth*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Hobart*, and elsewhere.

# FOUR POEMS

Catherine Wagner

THE AUTONOMY OF ART HAS ITS ORIGINS IN THE CONCEALMENT OF  
LABOR

My heart beat very hard by itself.

*from* INFRARES

Whence this yellow page?

Aha! a sun trap, mid-notebook, slept agog.

The first

word on the yellow page is to be unctuous

BIRDPILE.

“BIRDPILE” in flight? or

grounded (dead)?

Meaning

brutally dragged in.

*from* INFRARES

And we return to the question of the integration of color.

“Integration,” heard aloud, contains within it

“gray.” A sludgy neutral

fades.

Integration contains the word “shun.”

I am going to go underground  
and see what colors there are down there

Mines  
& Everyones.

I wake up and write continuously  
With short pauses

### I PRONOMIAL

deride and pony  
consciousness  
into halflit  
stable.  
One rides a horse  
to go somewhere, of course.

The actual is  
flickering a binary  
between word and not-word.  
I said I needed to have the end of the word for next.  
But I did not need it. Next comes anyway  
whatever you say.  
I and time were made for/of each other.

--

Catherine Wagner's latest book is *Nervous Device* (City Lights, 2012). She teaches at Miami University and lives in Oxford, Ohio with her son Ambrose.

# FOUR POEMS

Danielle Pafunda

Dear Mom and Dad,

All my rights are alienable. That I hold onto them for the time being is material. I might pull my breast out and shriek when it's offended. I might not pull my breast out. My breast is small, targeted, fetid, prudish, hot to the touch, infected, swarming, bedecked, pierced through, has sleep in the eye, makes it clear that I am on borrowed time. All my privileges are plenty suckled up around me at night in the bed when I dream of getting out of here of getting a pretty boyfriend who loves my face when I dream of getting in good with all the girlbangfutures and forming a party, and I dream of the dress I will wear to the emancipation of all bad feelings. I pray to be a beautiful actress and model whom everyone loves and also for all the cats to be relieved of their despair and the dog never to suffer loneliness and also for all the strangers whose diseases and failures I'm unable to catalogue. My prayer is addressed to the heart of the construction, to the gear from which all shafts emanate. I am a white girl in a headdress. Costume is a privilege. As are ostrich feathers as are gestures made with the ringed hand as are tilts of the head. My privilege gets sawn in half two-for-a-quarter and I gape in mirrors at my own torso mounted on a butcher block trolley. Time and a half for

Your Ugly Little,  
Scab

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'll say this once: I'm an only child. No matter how many siblings you cook up in there, no one else will ever site you. No one else will play your mumblety-peg. It's always you and me alone in this gray metal drawer, bare bulb fetal scissors above us. I will go decades without input from the sibyls. I will gird my house with salt. When the time comes that it is no longer feasible to love you, I'll walk willingly into that severed state that is either real or Freud's hoodwink or whatevs, Mom and

Dad.

Your,  
Ugly Little Scab

Dear Mom and Dad,

Here is a story: once upon a time a flab went walking in the wooded valley near her cottage. In the wooded valley, she came upon three pennies and a bear. The bear said, these are my sister's eyes and her heart, help me return them to the sky. The flab said nothing, for she didn't speak bear. Give me your hand, flabby, said the bear, and the flab said nothing, though she held out her hand, which was scarred from hot water and clenching a map. Open your mouth, flabby, said the bear, and the flab said nothing, but opened her mouth to receive the three pennies. The bear tossed her high onto his back, where she wrapped her scarf around his neck to make the reins. The sun thudded into the wood and the bear leapt into the sky.

Every single constellation tells the story.

Your Ugly Little,  
Scab

Dear Mom and Dad,

It's language city. The cabal of nouns that does me in. They come toward me trailing their scents, a dead spaniel with his even more dead pheasant, whose wheels squeak, their slight flavor of metal on metal, metaphor loosing its linen. They stitch me into the hemispherical past. I'm not your girl, nor huffy king Henry's. Born in any other time, I'd have been just this raw mistake. The swan's wing crushing the fluted edge on the first attempt.



Your Ugly Little,  
Scab

--

Danielle Pafunda's books include *Manhater* (Dusie Press Books), *Iatrogenic: Their Testimonies* (Noemi Press), *My Zorba* (Bloof Books), and *Natural History Rape Museum* (Bloof Books). She's an editor at *Coconut Magazine* and teaches for the University of Wyoming.

Note: The first piece and particularly the phrase "all my rights are alienable" is inspired by Roxane Gay's essay on *The Rumpus*, "[The Alienable Rights of Women.](#)"

# MY MAN IS FRESH THO

Robert Bruno

Everyone needs to shut the fuck up about zombies It's high time we had a frank discussion about the reptilian agenda

i don't feel #1 handsome man i mean i never do but especially not right now Millions of people around the world are on the brink of literally starving to death and im reading about the new thor movie and thinking about how TODAY ON THE TRAIN I SAW A GUY EAT THREE BANANAS IN A ROW

When i grow up im gonna be a tornado god LOL just brought home a stray kitten But for the record this was my best hair day ever i finally found me irl im drinking Old Style Beer and taking a nap in sleep's clothing Dream suicide by microwave just

build a giant one and climb up inside (A cool way to die would be too many pizza rolls) These are names for the kitten:

based cat, murder hell, death beast, pimpcat 6.90, Enron, cat of 9-11 tails, GunFuck 420

Whatever happened to that one guy When he pulled out the third banana, i said no fucking way out loud to myself My favorite part about riding the bus real late at night in Spatula City is the people who are actually aliens with bad human costumes

The kitten names are all real short is the only bad thing i know this is really bad form but guys i was proud of this one: Black Sabbath Vol. 4

^^^simple, elegant, smart without beating you over the head with it Although it doesnt have the zip of GunFuck420

Stay cool and have a great summer would be a pretty funny suicide note It's never anybody's birthday anymore

Anybody real i mean (that's mostly true only a little joking)

--

Robert Bruno: YAY ME!

Note: This piece is comprised mainly of reconstructed lines from Drew Henderson's potential memoir: I Hate Everyone, Everything Sucks, and I Am The Only Smart Person: My Life In Words #JCROWNCHAMP

# FOUR POEMS

C. Violet Eaton

## RURAL HARMONICS

aye, breathsome spruce  
the veery alights  
upon  
then fox sparrow

pine tree does something

## GOODBYE BOOZE

please you to know the  
devil's in a johnboat

& in hir wee weird death  
the tetchy ones play buckpitch

or pedro they ante w/ say  
the same love one has for one's dog  
or for the wife of a friend  
the instruments of will  
keep you from

o sunny decimals  
that scatter the fucking changeable  
circumference of being the will  
that says if he buries something turn it over

that same will  
keep you from reruns  
of damask domestic dried flowers  
& pictures of kitty wells tacked to the wall

the will to derive courage

for what is courage but holding the hatchet  
as the wind scalps the appletree  
& the wire of song binds a mouth

## SMOKE TOUR FOR LUNATION

rousties eye the bitten eorthe  
west this unspooled line of transports  
curious in their sudden  
drag race  
out of the cloven moon of the host city

out of the external cloth  
its image which is  
mary henry barefoot  
at the pedals of an organ

out of its dolorous quint suspended  
over the television somewhere  
emptied out the tentpole struck

the image not empty not not somewhere

but the weather soon recoiling  
so no one remembers

lest those wimpling shrewes of men appear  
late in night's arcade

## SKINNY

you're in the rafters  
but I'm in my cups

& your face is just this sunken lane  
where a child he picks nettles

I'll think of a story  
where the child envisions a room

who fills the room w/ code you ask  
who pot the bunny  
who drive that mule

someone's  
dark  
moaning  
moodly

to bring soap to the river  
wash the mouth of it out

it'll be like tracing a curved line  
across a throat they say

who boils that river you ask  
what water & who moan

who wants to have killed a man

am I your only one now

--

C. Violet Eaton is the editor of *Bestoned*, a handmade journal of new metaphysical verse. Recent work has appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Cannibal*, *Aufgabe*, and *RealPoetik*. A chapbook, "No Outside Force Can Harm the Coyote," is forthcoming from *Free Poetry*. As Dowser, he occasionally releases small editions of 'hill drone' recordings from his home in northwest Arkansas. He also sells used & rare books.

# A WORK OF ART

Catherine Theis

1.

Classic, dead, rotting perfume.

1964. Cypress trees, dare I stare

at Roman aqueducts,

blank-eyed statues.

Getting rid of the thing

after it's made.

Afterwards, a Negroni.

Modernism

my favorite moment.

Is this because I'm patient?

Or because, like Erza Pound,

I don't want to remember anything,

stuck in a tent, eating flies?

2.

Shadows, trees,

single file line,

a French farm boundary.

I had no idea

you could erase the "you."

I didn't realize others

pound podiums

in distress of excess.

Loyal energy,

I desire you, piss-smelling

Naples, the freedom

to confect sweetness

at any old time.

3.

How often does a work of art

register a high bacteria count?

Closed for swimming.

Open for sunbathing.

Just to be safe, I renewed



my faith, apologizing  
to no one but myself,  
swimming inside the water.  
I am not your answer.  
The waves backtrack  
checking traffic. The avocado ripens  
in time for breakfast.

4.  
Wasn't really listening  
until he said,  
"Style is superficial."  
Really? Monotone, high arch  
all the same  
to us ants?  
I continued to not listen,  
the man  
megaphone  
who couldn't say synonyms  
or facilitator  
without a stutter.  
Felt the urn within.  
It pulsed in my body. It shrank-  
blossomed  
in alternating breaths,  
the museum's marble  
more dead than alive,  
wicked, excited about ending.

5.  
High-crested crane,  
the birds absolutely sing  
louder here (a red conditioning)  
in my mother's garden.  
Burdock root salad,  
I could forgive  
an inhumane act.  
Over Japanese food,  
we discussed the possibility  
of humankind.  
Why not, what's the point  
of not trying?  
I am its only author.

6.

The kids tramp in the waves.

The kids tramp  
in the rocks, tramp  
in sideways glint sun.

When the sun's out—

a fellowship of others—  
a bruise darkening  
on my suntanned leg.

The facts of my biography:

I grew up in a teepee,  
distilled moonshine  
from my tears,  
mailed letters  
from inside the rough,  
left the matches  
at the last camp site.

Recalibration,

I get too excited  
starting again.

7.

"You gave him the best years  
of your life,"

which could have been true  
if I were someone else.

A rompy-stomp collector  
of paint,  
a perfection of hardness.

I move the beach towel  
at the last minute, the pink  
of my childhood  
in the foreground.

The facts of myself  
add up to no facts. The facts  
of others implied.

8.

Vigor, sexual enthusiasm,  
white hairs  
in private. To be touched  
like Odysseus, bathed and oiled  
after washing up

on the beach.

The spirit of hospitality  
    creasing my body  
in a million folds.

It doesn't really matter  
except here.

Just the facts:  
You're sentimental,  
I'm not. The white billows.  
Did I get that right?

9.

Authentic art,  
    does it exist  
    or spectator art or political or  
labor or authentic recycling,  
or bemused expression?  
You lied!

I didn't let you  
    suffer enough.  
Authentic life, a grocery store list,  
a diary excerpt  
    trashed in the car.  
The cataracts falling  
from my eyes.  
    See with my eyes,  
what women did you miss?  
        Broken terra-cotta star,  
        airborne in every lifetime.

10.

Courtyard as oracle.  
Complaint as oracle.  
Castration as oracle.  
Couple as oracle.  
Crowd as oracle.  
Contact as oracle.  
Conversation as oracle.  
Cassia as oracle.  
Compare as oracle.  
Coffin as oracle.  
Civilian as oracle.  
Circumference as oracle.  
Catherine as oracle.

11.

One airplane  
 flies above the lake.  
 Blue, blue, green.  
 "I have an idea,"  
 to be fully open  
 dilated, generous  
 rejection,  
 you don't scare me.  
 During the heat wave,  
 my body relaxed,  
 "confiscated studies"  
 a measure of yearning.  
 I inclined into my appetite,  
 hungry, insatiable.

12.

Catherine.  
 Catherine.  
 Catherine.  
 Catherine.  
 Catherine.  
 Catherine  
 Me.  
 Me.  
 Me.  
 Me.  
 Me.  
 Me.

13.

Woke up.  
 Coffee et cigarette.  
 Yoga et water.  
 Beach et sun.  
 Writing at desk.  
 Reading in bed.  
 Side ponytail.  
 Ingrown hair.  
 Shower, nakedness,  
 crème.  
 More bed.

Airplane tickets.  
Built the fire.  
Back in bed.  
Got up to make drink.  
Grilled vegetable  
dinner.  
Desk. Letters.  
Cigarette.  
Love letter.  
Back to beach  
to rescue lover  
on wayward wave.  
Back to bed.  
Orgasm.  
Back and forth  
death dream.

14.  
Ate dinner at my desk,  
          the quotidian cliffhanger.  
The sausage perfectly cooked.  
Until next time.  
      In the bridle of new forms,  
          the world itself cooked.  
The fruit washed by hand,  
      eaten by hand,  
      picked by hand,  
the hooks don't care  
      if the rapture is forced.  
      Remember,  
neither should you.

15.  
Apologia returned to sender.  
      Postage due.  
Nine pages worth of intention,  
apologia, restatement, then  
a clue. Hyperbole. The goddess  
Isis mentioned.  
Needy, improvised,  
      a twist. I don't see  
      a twist at all.  
"Please pass the mustard  
for my sausage."

Sometimes it lies straight.

16.

Candlelite. Canskate.

Candidate. Candente.

A dressing room, a fitting  
room, you choose

texture, smokiness, heartiness, elasticity,  
a Rogers Park corner coffee shop  
before I can go swimming.

Coffee before beer. Singing before  
kissing. Sunscreen before sun.

My navy blue shirt without  
the bra. My tits shaped  
against the wind.

Summer buzzed in.

A happy baby carrier.

Breastfeeding, and body  
slings. Slave or straight,  
a tuna casserole addressed  
to everyone, and beer, cold sprung  
chamomile-nettled spring.

17.

Tall willow teeth, tooth  
blessing, tooth country, a tininess  
described as unwieldy.

My lap.

A vaster plain. Work  
where none existed  
because that's what I thought  
was expected of me.

A wide worthiness  
wears the wool of my work,  
the tight plaid offspring  
warps the wainscoting,  
the senses de-sensed.

Not much accomplished  
when it's hot outside.

The beach closed, again,  
the waves too high. The high  
bacteria count. Someone is lying,  
that's how political office works.

I hear the mice search



for Parmigiano-Reggiano  
a sweep scurrying! Romano!  
Faster to crumb!

18.  
The swaddling unnecessary.  
I talk. I don't listen.  
I sit around  
in my own room  
in my bathing suit  
in my pile of money,  
interacting less with the world.  
Objectively, and historically,  
this is an improvement.

19.  
Hello, it's me.

20.  
From the loaded gun,  
a sign read, "To be continued..."

--

Catherine Theis is a Provost Fellow at USC, and lives in southern California. Her first book is called *The Fraud of Good Sleep* (Salt Modern Poets, 2011). Catherine's latest chapbook, *The June Cuckold*, a tragedy in verse, is published by Convulsive Editions.

# THREE POEMS

Suzi F. Garcia

## SKETCH OF A JOURNEY #7

An uncovering, the vintage idea of apocalypse.  
Dovetailed accounts printed  
on limestone through modern lithography. The miles

have been miscalculated. (Do you even own  
a computer anymore?) A lecture at Yale,

YEATS' PHALLOCENTRIC POETRY WAS A MESSAGE TO ALIENS, A MAP TO THE  
ASHES OF HIS FATHER, and I wonder

if they ever find them. Step in time, step and  
time, what happened  
to my left foot? Passed lost mistakes  
and on to Alaska, where the fish will gather around us  
like smoke.

## REGENERATE AT WILL BUT YOU WILL BE FORGOTTEN

Wolves prowl  
around garbage behind  
my apartment/ I wrap my ears

in the furs of rabbits. Sometimes  
I dance with the man in the apartment  
above me; he steps back/ the floorboard  
overhead creeks/ I step forward.

Silence follows, and then  
a sharp deep push of noise hangs

between us/ we can see each other  
across a fence. Is that fire?

No, but smoke. No, but  
blood.

A Rothko in the city's square/Men smear  
red paint on their faces. A child sucks on salt licks/  
there isn't anywhere far enough so  
we walk everywhere. I bend my neck/ California/ but

Mexico was lost. There is no new/ there is no old;  
once I was fascinating

### SKETCH OF A JOURNEY #23

We are where we were, the world circles.

I flew to see you on the Fourth of July,

and the Midwest began sending out messages, tap code in the form

of fireworks, blurred blues meant keep going, coppers, turn away.

I thought the guy next to me said sinister in his sleep but when I turned, he was staring

at the seat in front of him. There was a well with a sheen of oil in the backyard of your home (a  
personal Gulf Coast) and I bet I could

set it on fire if I dared: the smoke from your water would play  
like puppets on a screen:

Here, a shark's fin

Here a tree

A Pollack on sky, clear. Then the day appeared  
and I waited it out on your porch, nothing lit.

At sundown, you were still gone and I was too, a friend told me  
to find you at sea, where we could break the dark calm.

I spent the night on a rock, searching for fins against the dark.

When they found me, I broke out of their circle with a high long whistle.

a long high call

a long gone thought

The first time the last time is the same. A plane appears in a sharp lift neither here nor there.

I tried a new depth, where I cannot see easily, but there are no surprises, just  
more  
mud and gills and I cannot disrupt them.

A gold chain around my neck choked me, and I swam to shore, ran, a lit match.

I can discover unknown shapes on the coast, create them with the push of body,  
a man asks me for the time but I shook my head. Children ask me to play. I forget to eat.

A form of art that looks like me that looks like art.

--

Suzi F. Garcia is a poet in the MFA program at Notre Dame and the co-editor of the [Canarium Books Tumblr](#). She spends her free time watching K-dramas with her cats and boyfriend. Her work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Word Riot*, *Heavy Feather Review*, and *The Dirty Napkin*.

## THREE POEMS

Emily Wilson

### THE MODEL HAND

The somewhat off-sized illuminated  
“I”

pedals its gold kerns  
at the edge of  
the (unknown?) text, which gives  
if you will  
from its tweediness  
to retiform wings  
of a dragonfly tipped in below  
stiff-haired, protracted  
calamine blue and sectored  
hemimorphite pilaster to—  
the wings in congress—  
arcs of the common  
pear leaf and half-pried  
bud of the wastrel carnation.  
It was opposed to the tight blossom  
end that the stem apparently snaked  
to the woodier  
stem, it has been my misfortune—the  
sheltered things so supernaturally  
in confidence with  
what I was  
trying to pay attention to—

### SACCADE

In the photosensitive ground  
my vision sleeps, stalked in love and  
dread, in the metaphorical  
fund we would be chemically  
composed in, a simple order scanning

shoots moving whiplike overhead,  
 trip-wire threads sprung from the least  
 constant, but to fix the sliding  
 sense, cluster-feeding subjects, things  
 we do on the retinal trap, still  
 we do them darker for the fovea  
 mills inside its nest, small  
 harlequin shark the eye bequeaths  
 somehow stranger to itself  
 astride the compassing mouth,  
 tensile glues, the mailed  
 shimmed enameling traveling to snap  
 the snap-strike future of its view, what  
 I feared, tinged, dissolved.

## FLORILEGIUM

The double peony  
 doubling still its still  
 surround the honeysuckle's  
 "rococo sinuosities" doing  
 their dippings into  
 shades a close rejoinder to  
 backward tugs in  
 petit-point sheaths all  
 the false conductions  
 wild importations going on  
 in deep shade under  
 the flailed honeysuckle  
 boring through the loose slats  
 sounds like a drone  
 in phased  
 containments the artless  
 interest solitary  
 traced you could say  
 artlessly of  
 an "art"  
 that holds in place  
 hairstreak on  
 sheer tusk of mauve  
 delphinium

artless

brute appointment

--

Emily Wilson is the author of two poetry collections, *The Keep* (2001) and *Micrographia* (2009). She lives with her husband and two sons in Iowa City, Iowa.



# INTERNS

Danniel Schoonebeek

Do us scofflaws belong here us scoured and laughingstock

who drag up

our work sacks

our brickbags yes trowels

our mortar

us women whose bellies are sag low

and scuff

and leave a white trail where they drag cross the floor

Do our husbands assigned us wake up in the trenches

and hear us salute

our nimrod our blind man

(who carved us

our plot is who fired

our furnace)

and our blessing's our work and our building's our blessing

•

Letter the peregrine delivers my husband each morning reads death to the boss

because *boss*

means you watch him

when he shears

my wool in the break room

and burning his name in my flanks you won't

doubt I'm livestock

A boss is like god

only smarter a boss means you hear him

he settles

my name in the ledger

and signing his name on my timesheet he writes

*I'm babel* in chalk

His signature doesn't it look good to eat just like peasant bread

All the holes

nibbled through

in his yeast

all his crusts

good and stale

for my soups

A boss means

the leather

that holds up my slacks

he scratches

his name there the pennies

I place in my loafers

that shine

on the tongue

It's death to the boss because *boss*

means he authors

the front of my paycheck and husband believe me I witness him

A fresh coat of flour

his name

on the crumbs I sneak home

His name is the mouse god when the mouse god abandons his hole

And husband why

is my name

always looks

like the last

train through

town hit it

Or better yet

our blind

nimrod's chariot

And answer me husband will the boss sign me too

When you answer me husband

will the boss sign you

When she cries will we see

in chalk

in her mouth

the boss

on our child's dead tooth

Let's pray he signs her with fire and we all call her gospel

Let's pray on my cable

back south

to the trenches

I graze

past the boss

on his way to the heavens

--

Danniel Schoonebeek's first book of poems, *American Barricade*, will be published by YesYes Books in 2014. A chapbook, *Family Album*, is forthcoming from Poor Claudia this fall. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Tin House*, *Boston Review*, *Fence*, *Gulf Coast*, *BOMB*, *Indiana Review*, *Guernica*, *Denver Quarterly*, *jubilat*, *Verse Daily*, *Drunken Boat*, and elsewhere. He writes a monthly column on poetry for *The American Reader*, hosts the Hatchet Job reading series in Brooklyn, and edits the PEN Poetry Series.